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BRIGID LAY

"THE GIN GAME:" PULITZER PRIZE PLAY

ANNCR: AMONG THE MANY PULITZER PRIZES AWARDED ANNUALLY FOR EXCELLENCE IN JOURNALISM, THERE ARE FREQUENTLY AWARDS FOR ACHIEVEMENTS IN THE ARTS AND LITERATURE -- BUT NOT INVARIABLY. IF NO DRAMA, FOR EXAMPLE, IS THOUGHT WORTHY OF AN AWARD, THEN NO PRIZE IS GIVEN IN THAT CATEGORY. THIS YEAR, HOWEVER, IT WAS ANNOUNCED APRIL 17 THAT A PLAY HAD COME UP TO THE HIGH STANDARD OF THE JUDGES AND BEEN AWARDED A PULITZER. IT IS A TWO-CHARACTER PIECE CALLED "HE GIN GAME" BY DONALD L. COBURN. VOA'S BRIGID LAY HAS THESE COMMENTS.

VOICE: THERE WAS A TIME WHEN STAGE PLAYS HAD DRAMATIC ACTION. THERE WAS PHYSICAL MOVEMENT, CHARACTERS MAKING ENTRANCES AND EXITS, CREATING SCENES, CONFRONTATIONS, MAKING DECISIONS, REACTING AGAINST EACH OTHER TO FORM NEW CONFIGURATIONS OF THE PLOT. THE ACTION PRINCIPLE HELD GOOD AS MUCH -- OR MORE -- FOR COMEDY AS FOR DRAMA. /

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TODAY, THERE IS A NEW STYLE OF PLAYWRITING. IT IS CHARACTERIZED BY A MINIMUM OF ACTION -- OR RATHER THE ACTION IS INTERNAL, REVEALED ALMOST ENTIRELY THROUGH DIALOGUE, AND THE INTERACTION OF THE PLAYERS SPRINGS FROM AN INCREASING KNOWLEDGE -- SHARED WITH THE AUDIENCE -- NOT OF WHAT THE CHARACTERS DO BUT WHAT THEY ARE.

SUCH A PLAY IS DONALD COBURN'S "THE GIN GAME."

HERE ARE TWO ELDERLY PEOPLE -- A MAN AND A WOMAN -- SHE, IN A SHAPELESS HOUSEDRESS AND SCUFFED SLIPPERS, HE, IN A WORN, GREY BATHROBE, SUPPORTING HIMSELF WITH A CANE. THEY HAVE

VOICE: (CONT'D) BOTH REJECTED THE COMPANY OF THEIR FELLOWS, WHO SPEND ALL THEIR WAKING HOURS IN FRONT OF THE TELEVISION SET, TO FIND REFUGE IN THE DILAPIDATED SUN PORCH OF AN OLD PEOPLE'S HOME ... SEEKING PRIVACY, FINDING BOREDOM.

THE MAN PROPOSES THAT THEY PLAY A CARD GAME, GIN RUMMY: (A GAME IN WHICH THE GOAL IS TO COLLECT SETS OF THE SAME NUMBERS OR SEQUENCES OF NUMBERS IN THE SAME SUIT) . THE MAN WILL TEACH THE WOMAN THE GAME BUT, TO HIS INCREASING FURY AND FRUSTRATION, SHE WINS ALL THE GAMES -- EXCEPT FOR ONE WHICH, EVEN WORSE, SHE ALLOWS HIM TO WIN.

THROUGHOUT THE COURSE OF THE PLAY, THE TWO PEOPLE PLAY FOURTEEN HANDS OF "GIN." AND, AS THEY PLAY, THEY TALK, AT FIRST, THEY EXCHANGE COMMONPLACES; THEN, AS THE COMPETITIVE TENSION MOUNTS AND THE MAN BECOMES MORE IRASCIBLE AND AGGRESSIVE, THEY FIND THEMSELVES, WITHOUT CONSCIOUS WILL, REVEALING MORE AND MORE OF THE PEOPLE THEY TRULY ARE, AND THE CIRCUMSTANCES THAT HAVE LEFT THEM ALONE AND NEGLECTED IN THIS DISMAL SETTING.

SO, THE PLAY, FOR THE MOST PART, IS TWO PEOPLE SITTING AT A CARD TABLE. ITS STRENGTH LIES IN THE INSIGHTS WE GET INTO TWO VERY REAL PEOPLE, BOTH, IN THEIR OWN WAYS, DEFENDING THEMSELVES AGAINST THE INDIGNITIES OF OLD AGE.

"THE GIN GAME" IS THE FIRST, AND ONLY, PLAY BY FORTY-YEAR-OLD DONALD COBURN. A NATIVE OF BALTIMORE, MARYLAND, THE AUTHOR SERVED IN THE U-S NAVY, TRIED HIS HAND AT ADVERTISING AND, ABOUT TEN YEARS AGO, STARTED WRITING SHORT STORIES. HE IS MARRIED, WITH TWO CHILDREN, AND LIVES IN DALLAS, TEXAS.

VOICE: (CONT'D) "THE GIN GAME" WAS FIRST PRODUCED IN A TINY, 49-SEAT THEATER IN LOS ANGELES (CALIFORNIA) WHERE IT WAS SEEN BY THE WELL-KNOWN ACTOR, HUME CRONYN. HE IMMEDIATELY DECIDED IT MUST COME TO BROADWAY, COSTARRING HIMSELF AND HIS WIFE, JESSICA TANDY. THE HUSBAND AND WIFE TEAM ARE STILL PLAYING THE "GIN GAME" TO RECEPTIVE AND APPRECIATIVE AUDIENCES WHO, NO DOUBT, ARE ALSO APPLAUDING THE RECOGNITION ACCORDED BY THE PULITZER PRIZE.

BML/YRV